



## Short Update

August 30<sup>th</sup> 2024 / KHRG #24-320-D1

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## Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC soldiers arbitrarily arrested and detained two villagers, including a 16-year-old, in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township (July 2024)

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*This Short Update describes events occurring in Daw Hpah Hkoh (Thandaunggyi) Township, Taw Oo (Toungoo) District, in July 2024. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024, the Shar Htoo Waw Team attacked State Administration Council (SAC) trucks on a road between Leik Tho Town and Toungoo Town, in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township. On the same day, after the fighting, SAC soldiers from Kon Nit Maing (7 Miles) army camp arbitrarily arrested two youngsters, including a minor, who were travelling to Toungoo Town, accusing them of being involved in the fighting. The SAC soldiers took the villagers to SAC Infantry Battalion (IB) #39 army camp. Local villagers believe that the SAC soldiers tortured the two villagers during interrogation in order to obtain a false confession. The parents of one of the victims went to IB #39 army camp to see the detained but were denied the visit. No one knows about their condition or fate.<sup>1</sup>*

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### Fighting in Daw Hpah Hkoh Township

In the afternoon of July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024, Shar Htoo Waw Team ['Polaris Star Team']<sup>2</sup>, consisting of combined People's Defence Force (PDF)<sup>3</sup> and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)<sup>4</sup> troops under the command of KNLA Battalion #5 in Brigade #2, ambushed 12 State Administration Council (SAC)<sup>5</sup> military trucks (from Southern Command Headquarters in Toungoo Town) who were returning from Leik Tho army camp in Leik Tho Town, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, Taw Oo District, after transporting food rations. The fighting lasted around three hours. The incident took

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<sup>1</sup> The present document is based on information received in July 2024. It was provided by a community member in Taw Oo District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG.

<sup>2</sup> Shar Htoo Waw Team (or 'Polaris Star Team') is a military unit consisting of combined PDF and KNLA troops specialised in developing fixed-wing drone technology and drone warfare, also called 'Kloud Team'. They operate remotely out of Karen State and are informally part of the KNLA military structure. Shar Htoo Waw Team also provides drone technology to other PDF units that operate outside of Karen State.

<sup>3</sup> The People's Defence Force (PDF) is an armed resistance established independently as local civilian militias operating across the country. Following the February 1st 2021 military coup and the ongoing brutal violence enacted by the junta, the majority of these groups began working with the National Unity Government (NUG), a body claiming to be the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar, which then formalized the PDF on May 5th 2021 as a precursor to a federal army.

<sup>4</sup> The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

<sup>5</sup> The State Administration Council (SAC) is the executive governing body created in the aftermath of the February 1st 2021 military coup. It was established by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on February 2nd 2021, and is composed of eight military officers and eight civilians. The chairperson serves as the de facto head of government of Burma/Myanmar and leads the Military Cabinet of Myanmar, the executive branch of the government. Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of SAC chairperson following the coup.

place on a road between Leik Town and Toungoo Town. According to local PDF soldiers and local villagers, several SAC soldiers were killed and injured in the fighting. One of the SAC military trucks was destroyed. Shar Htoo Waw Team also confiscated seven guns from the SAC soldiers.

### **Arbitrary arrest of two youngsters**

After the fighting [on the evening of July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024], SAC soldiers from Kon Nit Maing (7 Miles) army camp in charge of road security arrested two young villagers on a road next to their army camp, while the villagers were travelling on a motorbike to Toungoo Town. Kon Nit Maing (7 Miles) army camp is located beside a road between Toungoo Town and Thandaunggyi Town, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township. After the SAC soldiers arrested the two villagers, they took them to SAC Infantry Battalion (IB)<sup>6</sup> #39 [Lay Maing (4 Miles)] army camp in [the boundary between] Daw Hpah Hkoh Township [and Htao Ta Htoo Township].

These two [arrested] villagers are Saw<sup>7</sup> A--- (21 years) and Saw B--- (16 years). They are friends. They both are Karen and Christian, from D--- Town, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township. Saw A--- is a displaced villager who was staying in E--- village, Day Loh Mu Nu area, Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, before he was arrested. Saw B--- is a displaced villager who stayed in F--- village, Seik Pu Taung village tract,<sup>8</sup> Daw Hpah Hkoh Township, before he was arrested.

Local villagers [who met with Saw A--- and Saw B--- shortly before they were arrested and saw their phones] believe that the SAC arrested these two villagers because they found a picture of Saw B--- wearing camouflage clothes in his phone. Therefore, SAC soldiers [likely] thought these two villagers were PDF members who attacked the SAC military trucks from Southern Command Headquarters on that day.

According to local villagers, Saw A--- and Saw B--- were detained and interrogated in SAC IB #39 army camp. [The villagers believe that] during the interrogation, the SAC beat, hit and tortured Saw A--- and Saw B---, causing them to be very frightened, so whatever the SAC soldiers asked them, they just answered "Yes". For example, when the SAC asked them whether they were PDF members, they just replied "Yes" [while being tortured], even though they are not PDF members. [According to a villager, who was told by a former SAC officer from IB #39, Saw B--- told the SAC that he was involved in the fighting on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024. Nevertheless, Saw A---'s mother and other local villagers told KHRG that Saw A--- and Saw B--- are not PDF members.]

After the SAC soldiers took Saw A--- and Saw B--- to IB #39 army camp, Saw A---'s parents went to IB #39 army camp [unknown date] in order to see their son [and his friend] as they worried about them. There, they requested to see Saw A--- and Saw B---, but the SAC did not allow seeing them. Saw A---'s parents told a village head of E--- village about what happened to their son and asked him for help in order to release their son. [As of August 2024, the two villagers have not been released and information about their condition or whereabouts has not been provided to their family members].

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<sup>6</sup> An Infantry Battalion (IB) comprises 500 soldiers. However, most Infantry Battalions are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers. Yet up to date information regarding the size of battalions is hard to come by, particularly following the signing of the NCA. They are primarily used for garrison duty but are sometimes used in offensive operations.

<sup>7</sup> 'Saw' is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

<sup>8</sup> A village tract is an administrative unit of between five and 20 villages in a local area, often centred on a large village.

Further background reading on the situation on arbitrary arrests and torture in Southeast Burma/Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- [\*Permanent Scars : Torture of villagers under arbitrary detention by State Administration Council in Southeast Burma \(January - December 2023\)\*](#), April 2024;
- ["Taw Oo District Short Update: SAC shot dead a minor and arbitrarily arrested, detained and tortured a villager in Htaw Ta Htoo Township \(May 2024\)"](#), July 2024;
- ["Mergui-Tavoy District Incident Report: Arbitrary arrest and killing of a villager by the SAC in K'Ser Doh Township, October 2023"](#), March 2024;
- ["Doo Tha Htoo District Incident Report: A male villager was arrested, tortured and killed by the SAC in Kyeh Htoh Township"](#), in July 2023, January 2024.

### About KHRG

Founded in 1992, Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Burma. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District Map  
SEVEN KNU ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT



Legend

- Town
- Village tract point
- Army Base
- Army Camp
- Major Road
- - - Sub-Road
- Water
- Kawthoolei Township boundary
- Kawthoolei District boundary

Elevation (meter)

- |           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| 35 - 15   | 493 - 841     |
| 15 - 96   | 841 - 1,337   |
| 96 - 261  | 1,337 - 2,016 |
| 261 - 493 | 2,016 - 5,711 |

Map ID: KHRG\_District\_Map\_Taw Oo  
Date: 19-Jul-2022  
Size: 33.11 X 46.8 inches

